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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/13/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV JO

SUBJECT: A/S WELCH'S MEETING WITH KING'S ADVISOR

REF: AMMAN 5192

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DAVID HALE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) A/S Welch and DAPNSA Abrams met with Bassem Awadallah, director of the King's office, in Amman July 12. Awadallah's political director Jafar Hassan, Ambassador, and polcouns (notetaker) joined. Discussions focused on that day's Hizballah capture of two Israeli soldiers, the Gaza crisis, and Iran.

Israel and Hizballah

¶2. (C) Welch reviewed U.S. action to address the developments that day on the Israel-Lebanon border. Awadallah agreed that the Israelis could not be expected to "sit there" but urged the U.S. to continue pressing Israel to focus its military response on Hizballah itself. Welch stressed that Arab friends needed to join the U.S. in pressing the Lebanese government to issue a good statement. They also needed to warn the Syrians that their posture (exemplified by FM Shara's statement praising the Hizballah action) was very dangerous. The Arab League emergency meeting expected July 15 needed to avoid the kind of condemnation of Israel that the League usually produced in the name of "balance." Awadallah agreed; "this is an Arab matter" and Jordan would join others in pushing for a flat condemnation of militias initiating conflicts that "none of the Arab states want."

¶3. (C) Beyond the immediate crisis, Welch said, the U.S. and its Arab partners should think about where they want to be when it is contained, and have a common understanding on how to deal responsibly with the Palestinian question and the threat of Iran. We agreed on the need to empower Abu Mazen, and agreed Iran was now a hegemonic threat. How to address that threat's manifestation in Damascus should be at the top of the agenda.

¶4. (C) Awadallah agreed the moderate Arabs needed to send a unified message to Damascus aimed at defusing the latest crisis. Egypt would not be patient with Bashar. Awadallah urged the U.S. for its part to call firmly for Israeli restraint. Welch said the USG was doing this already, but needed to know what Jordan's message to Damascus was. Awadallah reviewed recent GOJ-SARG conversations, and insisted Jordan had used them all to press Damascus to move away from Iran. In Awadallah's assessment, Iran wanted to deny Arabs any meaningful role. Iran was driving the Arabs into a situation that resembled the eve of the 1967 war.

Israel and Hamas

¶5. (C) Awadallah reported that Abu Mazen complained to King Abdullah in Amman July 11 that the Israelis were not hurting Hamas in Gaza, only ordinary Palestinians. Khaled Mishaal provoked the crisis in Gaza on the advice of Hizballah,

Awadallah claimed. Mishaal wants to become "the destination" for anyone who wanted to defuse tension in the region, and Iran stood behind him. The GOJ saw Hizballah's capture of the two Israeli soldiers that day as Iranian inspired) "another card in Iran's pocket before it sits down with the U.S." He reviewed King Abdullah's efforts to forge an anti-Iran Arab coalition (reftel). Some Arabs were responsive; others, like Qatar, were for appeasement; they were playing the role of "Neville Chamberlain." Saudi Arabia was reluctant to take a leading role, and had a divided government.

¶6. (C) Welch said the USG and its partners should use the present crisis to reach a new consensus for dealing with the problems of the region. There was already agreement that we needed a weaker Hamas and Hizballah, and a strengthened Abu Mazen. We should look to upcoming meeting opportunities) such as UNGA, or the GCC Summit) to act jointly.

Iran

¶7. (C) The U.S. and its Arab partners also needed an agreed action list for dealing with Iran, Welch said. Awadallah called this "music to Jordan's ears." It was necessary, the Jordanian said, to start the "Abu Mazen track" so that the Arabs can join the U.S. in confronting Iran. This will help with public opinion, an emerging problem for U.S. friends. "But only the U.S. President" could move the Israelis and Palestinians to re-engage. The U.S. also needed to address Arab concerns that a resolution between Iran and the powers on the nuclear issue would leave the GCC states exposed as Iran tries to strike a deal; Welch and Abrams replied by briefing Awadallah on the current state of play on the Iran nuclear issue.

Hale